

Diploma Decisions for Students with Disabilities



What Parents Need to Know

**Florida Department of Education
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
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Diploma Decisions ☐ **for Students with ☐** **Disabilities ☐**

What Parents Need to Know ☐

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Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services

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Diploma Decisions ☐ **for Students with ☐** **Disabilities ☐**

What Parents Need to Know ☐

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About This Guide



What Is the Purpose of This Guide?

This guide is designed for you, parents of students with disabilities. It provides information about types of diplomas available through the Florida public school system. Knowing about these options will help you make sure that the educational program your child participates in will lead to an appropriate diploma. The diploma will help your child achieve his or her goals for life after high school.

It's good to begin thinking about graduation options when your child is in elementary school. The elementary school program lays the foundation for future years. By the end of middle school, you and your child will be asked to make more definite plans about diploma choices. This is not a decision you will have to make on your own. You will be assisted throughout this process by school and district staff through the development of the individual educational plan (IEP). The diploma choice is reviewed each year at your child's IEP meeting. The type of diploma that your child is working toward may be changed.

How Is This Guide Organized?

This guide is organized into five sections to help you understand the steps along the path to graduation. Each section is briefly described below.

Part 1. Diploma Options in Florida Schools

Part 1 describes high school diploma options available through the Florida public school system. The requirements for each option are explained. This section also addresses choices for students with disabilities who do not meet requirements for a diploma. The pros and cons of each option are discussed.

Part 2. Choosing the Right Diploma

Part 2 explains how to choose the best diploma option for your child. In this section, you will learn about the role you and your son or daughter play as members of the transition IEP team. You will find out how your input helps shape the choice of diploma.

Part 3. Planning for Graduation Year by Year

Part 3 describes the steps to take each year, starting in the eighth grade, to ensure that your child earns the diploma that best meets his or her needs.

Part 4. A Note about the Future

Part 4 describes how you can keep informed of changes regarding diploma options and graduation requirements.

Appendices

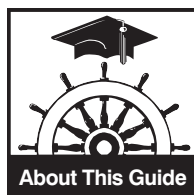
The appendices contain additional information to help expand your knowledge and understanding of some of the topics discussed in the guide.

How to Use This Guide

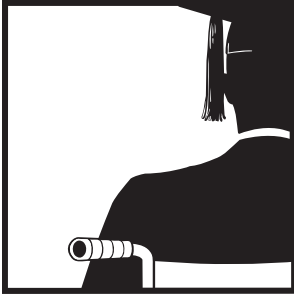
This guide may be used in several different ways. Reading the guide from beginning to end provides detailed information about diploma options and graduation requirements. For a quick overview, you can read the charts that summarize the important points in each section. You may also use the table of contents to locate specific topics you want to know more about.

Terms Used in This Guide

It's important to become familiar with the vocabulary used in Florida concerning diplomas and graduation requirements. These terms are printed in bold type the first time they appear in the guide. Explanations for these terms are provided in the content. Knowing these terms will help you participate more effectively in transition IEP meetings. You will better understand what is discussed. You will also be able to use this information to make diploma decisions.



Part 1: Diploma Options in Florida Schools □



To make sure your child graduates from high school, it's important to plan for the type of diploma he or she will earn. You will need to help monitor your son or daughter's progress toward that goal and assist school personnel in making changes in the educational program when needed.

Florida offers all students options regarding the type of program leading to a high school diploma. In this guide, you will learn how students with disabilities may pursue a standard diploma (a regular diploma) or a special diploma. Choices for students with disabilities who don't earn a diploma in high school will also be discussed.

In this section you will learn about

- ◆ Standard Diploma Options
- ◆ Special Diploma Options (Option 1 and Option 2)
- ◆ Certificates of Completion
- ◆ Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests
- ◆ Diploma Options and Desired Post-School Outcomes
- ◆ Weighing the Pros and Cons of Diploma Options.

Standard Diploma Options

The **standard diploma** is the type of high school diploma earned by most students who graduate from Florida high schools. All students, including students with disabilities, are entitled to try to earn a standard diploma. To do so, they must meet the graduation requirements set by the State of Florida and the local school districts.



Beginning in the 2003-2004 school year, students may choose from three different options for earning a standard diploma:

- ◆ a traditional, four-year 24-credit program
- ◆ a three-year, 18-credit college preparatory program
- ◆ a three-year, 18-credit career preparatory program.

Students should select the diploma option that best prepares them for education and career goals after high school. Students and their parents must receive information regarding

graduation options at the beginning of every school year between grades six and twelve. They should make an initial selection during the student's eighth grade year, prior to the beginning of the student's first year of high school. The traditional 24-credit program is the best choice for most students. It usually takes four years to complete. The college preparatory program and the career preparatory programs are accelerated programs that can be completed in three years. Students who select a three-year program should have the ability and desire to pursue an accelerated program. These students should have a clear vision of their future goals and be mature enough to succeed upon graduation. (Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, TAP No. FY 2004-02, 2003).

Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma

The Florida Legislature sets the general requirements for all programs leading to a standard diploma. This ensures that all students are able to perform at a high level when they graduate from high school. The general requirements are described in the chart below. (See "Appendix A: Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma" on page 35 for a detailed list of the requirements.)

State Graduation Requirements for Earning a Standard Diploma

Traditional 24-Credit Program	Three-Year, 18-Credit Programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ complete at least 24 academic credit hours, or an International Baccalaureate curriculum, in specified course work, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 15.5 credits in required subjects – 8.5 credits in electives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ complete at least 18 academic credit hours in specified course work, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 15 credits in required subjects – 3 credits in electives
All Programs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ earn a cumulative 2.0 grade point average (GPA) on an unweighted 4.0 scale ◆ earn passing scores on the Grade 10 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for reading and mathematics 	

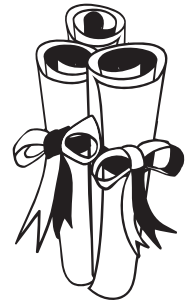
School districts may set additional requirements for the 24-credit program. They cannot change the requirements for the three-year graduation programs. For example, the State requires at least 24 credit hours of course work for earning a standard diploma through the traditional program. However, in some school districts, students are required to earn as many as 32 credit hours. Check with your child's teachers, guidance counselor, or local school district office to find out if your district has additional requirements for the traditional program.

Course Credit Requirements and Classroom Accommodations

The State requires students to earn a specific number of credit hours in certain courses for a standard diploma. For example, all students working toward a standard diploma must earn four credits in English and three credits in mathematics, including Algebra I or its equivalent. For credit towards a standard diploma, the requirements for **basic education** (regular academic) courses cannot be changed. Students with disabilities are expected to learn the same things as nondisabled students. However, **modifications** (changes) can be made to requirements for **career and technical education** (vocational) courses, as appropriate. (See “Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications” on page 37.)

Some courses may be too advanced for your son or daughter. If so, your child may be able to use Level I basic education courses to meet graduation requirements for required courses. Level 1 courses are fundamental courses that target lower skills. However, the use of Level I courses must be approved in writing by the principal, the guidance counselor, and the parent. Level I courses cannot be used to meet the requirement for Algebra I or its approved equivalent courses.

To graduate with a standard diploma, students must also earn a specific number of **elective** credits. There are many choices of elective courses. Students may take basic education and career and technical education courses for elective credits. Most ESE courses and all remedial and compensatory courses may only be used for elective credits. These courses are used to supplement regular courses or to develop needed skills. The ESE vocational courses for students with disabilities may be used to meet the 1/2 credit practical arts graduation requirement.



Keep in mind that students with disabilities may be provided **accommodations** in basic education courses, career and technical education courses, and tests. Accommodations may change the way a student is taught or tested. They do not change what the student is expected to learn.

Examples of Classroom Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ using adapted instructional tools, such as a calculator with enlarged numbers ◆ adjusting time demands and schedules, such as allowing more time to finish assignments and courses ◆ making changes in the learning environment, such as providing a work station suited to a wheelchair ◆ making changes to classroom assignments or tests, such as reading science test questions out loud

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Florida laws require that students with disabilities be given accommodations, if necessary. Students who qualify as students

with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are also eligible for accommodations, if needed. The transition IEP team or the 504 plan team determines which, if any, accommodations your child needs. This information is recorded on the student's IEP or 504 plan. Information about your child's accommodations must be provided to all teachers who work with him or her. (See "Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications" on page 37 for more information.)

Grade Point Average Requirement

To earn a standard diploma, students must earn a cumulative 2.0 grade point average (GPA) on an unweighted 4.0 scale for courses they have taken in high school. The cumulative GPA is the overall average of final grades received in courses. If a student receives a final grade of D or F for a course, the course may be repeated, according to state and district policies. Only the higher grade earned will count towards the cumulative GPA. Check with your school board district office for information regarding local grade forgiveness policies.

Assessment Requirements and Test Accommodations

Students, including those with disabilities, must take the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The FCAT measures student achievement of a number of the Sunshine State Standards, which identify the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn. The FCAT tests reading, writing, mathematics, and science. It is given in grades three through ten. Students must earn passing scores on the Grade 10 FCAT in reading and mathematics to earn a standard diploma.

Accommodations may be provided for the FCAT and for other State or district tests if a student with disabilities needs them. For example, a student with visual impairments may need to use a large print or Braille version of the test. A student with motor impairments who can't write independently may tell the answers to a test proctor instead of writing them. Necessary accommodations are identified by the student's IEP team or 504 plan team. Each student's IEP or 504 plan must include a statement of the testing accommodations the student requires, if any.

Accommodations used with the FCAT should be similar to those that the student uses in the classroom. Some accommodations used in the classroom are not allowed on the FCAT, because they change what the test measures. For example, students are not allowed to use calculators for basic computation on the FCAT mathematics in grades 3 through 6. If your child is provided an accommodation in the classroom that is not allowed on the FCAT, you must be told about possible consequences of allowing the student to use that accommodation in the classroom. Such an accommodation can only be used in the classroom with your written consent. (See "Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications" on page 37 for more information.)



If students do not pass the Grade 10 FCAT, they may retake the test during regularly scheduled testing times in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Students who fail the FCAT will receive remediation to help them learn the necessary skills. They may also take special courses to help them learn the skills tested on the FCAT. The IEP team should identify ways to help the student pass the FCAT.

For certain students with disabilities who have IEPs, a waiver may be considered for the FCAT requirement. A waiver can be granted if the IEP team determines that the FCAT does not accurately measure a student's ability, even with allowable accommodations. The student must have attempted the FCAT at least twice, for example, once during tenth grade and once during eleventh grade. The IEP team must document that the student has mastered the Sunshine State Standards tested on the FCAT. The student must also have the required credits and cumulative GPA for graduation. Only students who are seniors pursuing the traditional 24-credit standard diploma program are eligible for an FCAT waiver. The decision regarding a waiver cannot be made before the twelfth grade. Any student who has not achieved a passing score on the FCAT must receive intensive remediation. To help evaluate the effectiveness of the remediation and make sure that each student has had every opportunity to pass the FCAT, the student must participate in the March administration of the FCAT during his or her senior year.

Extended Time for Meeting Graduation Requirements

Students with disabilities who have not earned a standard diploma may stay in school until they are 22 years old. This also applies to students with disabilities who have been awarded a special diploma, certificate of completion, or special certificate of completion before age 22. The district must continue to offer services until the student is 22 years old or until the student earns a standard diploma, whichever comes first. This policy is included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Districts provide educational services in different ways for students who stay in school until age 22. Services and supports may be provided at the high school or at an off-campus location. Educational programs may also focus on preparing students for employment and adult life. The transition IEP team decides on the best placement for the student based on individual needs. Ask your local ESE or adult education office about opportunities available in your district.

Special Diploma Options

Special diplomas are available to students with disabilities who are not able to meet the requirements for a standard diploma. The State of Florida provides general guidelines for special diploma options. More specific requirements are set by each school district.



Two special diploma options are available for students with disabilities. All school districts in Florida must offer **special diploma option 1**. They may choose to offer **special diploma**

option 2. Most Florida school districts currently offer special diploma option 2. Check with your local school district ESE office to determine if option 2 is available in your district.

Who May Earn a Special Diploma?

Special diplomas are available to certain students with disabilities who have been properly identified as

- ◆ specific learning disabled ☐
- ◆ emotionally handicapped ☐
- ◆ educable mentally handicapped
- ◆ trainable mentally handicapped
- ◆ deaf or hard-of-hearing
- ◆ physically impaired
- ◆ language impaired
- ◆ profoundly handicapped (profoundly mentally handicapped, dual sensory impaired, autistic, or severely emotionally disturbed).

Students who are identified solely as visually impaired or speech impaired are not eligible for a special diploma. To be eligible, they must also have another identified disability.

Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 1



For special diploma option 1, students must earn the required number of course credits specified by the local school board. The course credits may be earned by taking ESE courses and/or basic education or career and technical education classes.

Students must also master the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma. These standards reflect modified, yet challenging expectations for students with disabilities who are working significantly below grade level. A student with disabilities is expected to master each standard at a level of functioning that is appropriate to the individual student. The transition IEP team will determine the level of functioning for each standard for your son or daughter.

The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma have benchmarks at three levels of functioning.

- ◆ ☐ Independent Level: Students are able to perform the skills for each benchmark on their own.
- ◆ ☐ Supported Level: Students require ongoing use of prompting or supervision in order to perform the skills for each benchmark.
- ◆ ☐ Participatory Level: Students require extensive personal assistance to be able to ☐ participate in activities of daily living. ☐

(See “Appendix C: The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma” on page 41 for additional information.)

State Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 1

To graduate with special diploma option 1, a student must

- ◆ earn the minimum number of course credits specified by the district school board (Credits may be earned in basic education, career and technical education, or exceptional student education classes.)
- ◆ master the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 2



Requirements for special diploma option 2 are based on mastery of a set of competencies identified for each individual student in a **graduation training plan**. The competencies are related to employment and access to the community. The State graduation requirements for special diploma option 2 are listed in the box below. These requirements are not based on course credits or mastery of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma. However, some school districts may require certain course credits for graduation under option 2.

State Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 2

To graduate with special diploma option 2, a student must

- ◆ be successfully employed full-time in the community for a minimum period of one semester, earning at least minimum wage
- ◆ achieve all annual goals and short-term objectives related to employment and community competencies identified on the transition IEP
- ◆ demonstrate mastery of employment and community competencies specified in his or her graduation training plan.

For option 2, the State requires a student to be successfully employed full-time, at or above minimum wage, for at least one semester. However, a school district may require a student to be employed for a longer period of time to ensure success. The specific goals, objectives, and competencies required for each individual student are planned by the transition IEP team. Additional requirements may be identified by the local school district.

Certificates of Completion

With careful planning and monitoring of progress, the majority of students with disabilities will be able to earn a diploma. However, some students may complete the required high school courses but fail to meet all of the other graduation requirements. Students who are unable to meet all graduation requirements may receive a **certificate of completion**. A certificate of completion is not a diploma. It certifies that a student attended high school but did not meet all graduation requirements.

Three types of certificates of completion are available.

- ◆ □ The **regular certificate of completion** □ is available to any student who passes □ the required courses in high school but □ doesn't achieve the required GPA and did □ not pass the Grade 10 FCAT. Students □ must be in the traditional, four-year 24- □ credit graduation program to receive a □ regular certificate of completion. Students □ with disabilities who are eligible for a □ regular certificate of completion may also □ choose to graduate under special diploma □ option 1. □



- ◆ □ The **certificate of completion–College Placement Test eligible** is available to any student who meets all of the requirements for graduation except passing the Grade 10 FCAT. This credential gives the student expanded options for postsecondary education and employment after high school. A student who receives this certificate of completion is allowed to take the College Placement Test and be admitted to either remedial or credit courses at a Florida community college, depending on the test score achieved. Any student with a disability staffed into an exceptional student education program who has left high school without earning a standard diploma or its equivalent may return to high school to further his or her education until age 22. The student may work towards earning a standard diploma, or its equivalent, or a certificate of completion–College Placement Test eligible.
- ◆ □ The **special certificate of completion** is available to students with disabilities who don't meet all graduation requirements for a special diploma. It certifies that the student passed the required ESE courses in high school, but failed to master all of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests

Students who have not earned a standard diploma in high school may earn one in another way. Students may earn a State of Florida diploma by passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests). Classes to prepare for the GED Tests are frequently offered through local adult education programs.

In many school districts, the GED Exit Option Model is available for high school students who are at risk of not graduating with their peer group. These programs are usually provided by local high schools and require students to be enrolled in high school courses while preparing for the GED Tests. Students who earn passing scores on the FCAT and the GED Tests are awarded a standard high school diploma. Students who pass only the GED Tests are awarded a State of Florida diploma.



The GED Tests consist of separate tests in five subject areas: Language Arts–Reading, Language Arts–Writing, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. The tests are written on a ninth-grade reading level. Students are required to determine content errors in written text on the Language Arts–Writing test. They must also write an essay. The mathematics test measures problem-solving skills in arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. In Florida, the GED Tests are available in English and Spanish. Special editions of the tests are available in large print and Braille and on audiocassette. Students with disabilities may receive appropriate accommodations when taking the GED Tests. Students must be at least 18 years old to take the GED Tests, unless they are enrolled in the GED Exit Option Model program. (See “Appendix D: Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of General Educational Development [GED Tests]” on page 43 for more information.)

Diploma Options and Desired Post-School Outcomes

When making diploma decisions, it’s important to think about your child’s desired **post-school outcomes**. What does he or she want to do after high school? Where and how does your son or daughter plan to live or be employed? How will he or she spend leisure time and engage in social relationships three to five years after leaving school? Planning for desired post-school outcomes will guide the transition IEP team when selecting the type of diploma that the student will need to meet these goals. The type of diploma or certificate of completion will have a direct impact on what doors are open to your son or daughter after high school.

This section addresses the requirements for some of the post-school outcomes that your son or daughter may wish to pursue, including

- ◆ employment
- ◆ military service ☐
- ◆ postsecondary education. ☐

As you read this section, be aware that there are often exceptions that can be made to general policies. You will need to find out specific requirements for employment, the military, and postsecondary programs in your community. You can ask your child's ESE teachers or guidance counselor for help. You can call military recruiters or admission offices of schools yourself. It is important to get answers to your questions before making any final decisions regarding the diploma your child will earn.

Employment

If your son or daughter plans to get a job right after leaving high school, you should consider the following:

- ◆□ All types of diplomas can lead to permanent employment. Successful completion of□ a high school program is an important achievement. High school transcripts list the□ courses and grades and whether or not the student was eligible for graduation.□
- ◆□ Students working on special diploma option 2 are employed as part of their□ graduation training plan. They may be able to stay in the same job when they graduate.□
- ◆□ Certificates of completion are not diplomas and are not thought of as diplomas by□ employers. Many students with certificates of completion are able to get jobs. However,□ the type of employment may be limited to unskilled jobs and opportunities for□ advancement may be restricted.□

Military Service

The requirements for each branch of the military (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard) are a little different. In general, you should know the following:

- ◆□ Acceptance into the military is based heavily on the score the student makes□ on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).□
- ◆□ The military requires a high school diploma for admission. A standard diploma□ is preferred. A State of Florida diploma earned by passing the GED Tests may be□ accepted. However, a student may be required to meet additional requirements such as a□ particular score on the ASVAB.□
- ◆□ Special diplomas may or may not be accepted for entrance into the military.



When considering the military, always check with your local recruiters for up-to-date information. Admission standards may vary depending on the need for recruits. In addition, individual capabilities of the applicant may be taken into account.

Postsecondary Education

If your child would like to continue his or her education after high school, there are many choices to consider. Your child may consider programs offered at technical



centers, community colleges, or four-year colleges. Your child's interests, abilities, and learning goals should guide this process. General requirements for admission to postsecondary education institutions are described below. You should also check with the individual school to determine local requirements and identify available programs.

Many postsecondary schools provide special services for students with disabilities. Contact a representative regarding your child's special needs. This person can answer your questions and assist your son or daughter in many ways. Students with disabilities in postsecondary educational institutions are legally entitled to accommodations. Student needs are considered on an individual basis. In special cases, a student with a disability may be eligible for substitutions for certain admission requirements.

Technical Centers

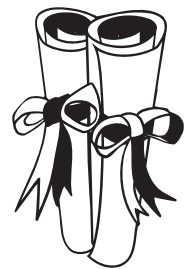
Technical centers train adult students in various trades and occupations. For example, students may learn plumbing or computer technology. Technical centers may be public or private. The State of Florida sets minimum admissions requirements for public technical centers. Students wishing to attend a technical center should know these facts:



- ◆□ Students may or may not need a standard diploma for admission. It depends on the□ technical center and the particular program. Students with a special diploma or□ certificate of completion are eligible for admission to technical certificate programs□ at public technical centers. These programs offer vocational training with no college□ credit. Other programs may require a standard diploma or a State of Florida diploma□ earned by passing the GED Tests.□
- ◆□ Students may be required to take tests to measure basic skills for certain career and□ technical education programs.□

Community Colleges

Community colleges offer programs leading to two-year degrees. They may also offer career and technical education programs. The State sets the minimum admission requirements for community colleges. For programs leading to two-year degrees, the following requirements usually apply.



- ◆□ Students with standard diplomas are eligible for acceptance into community□ colleges. Students with State of Florida diplomas earned by passing the GED Tests are□ also accepted.□
- ◆□ Students with a certificate of completion—College Placement Test eligible are allowed to□ take the College Placement Test and be admitted to remedial or credit courses at state□ community colleges, as appropriate.□
- ◆□ Students with special diplomas or regular certificates of completion are not generally□ eligible for admission to community colleges. However, students may be allowed to□ earn up to 12 credit hours as nondegree-seeking students while working to pass the□

GED Tests.

For career and technical education programs in community colleges, the following requirements usually apply.

- ◆□ Depending on the particular program, students may or may not need a standard diploma for admission. Students with a special diploma or regular certificate of completion are eligible for admission to technical certificate programs. These programs offer vocational training with no college credit. Career and technical education programs with college credit usually have the same admission requirements as other two-year degrees.
- ◆□ Students may be required to take tests to measure basic skills for certain career and technical education programs.

State Universities in Florida

Is your son or daughter hoping to attend a four-year state university following high school? Four-year universities generally have higher admission requirements than community colleges.



- ◆□ Standard diplomas or State of Florida diplomas earned by passing the GED Tests are usually required for admission. High school course work for standard diploma must meet both standard diploma and minimum state university admission requirements.
- ◆□ Additional entrance requirements include certain grade point averages and scores on college entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). Accommodations are allowed on these exams for students with disabilities.
- ◆□ State universities may also require students to submit written essays or portfolios of their work with their applications for admission.

Private Colleges and Universities and Public Universities in Other States

Private colleges and universities in Florida and out-of-state institutions are not governed by the same requirements as state universities. Contact the admissions office at each college or university for information regarding specific admission requirements for that institution.

Adult Day Training and Supported Employment

Students with severe cognitive disabilities may need specialized training programs after high school. **Adult day training** is a service provided through an adult training center. These centers are located in the community and have structured activities that help prepare individuals to work at a full time job. Adult day training may also include activities that help people improve or maintain daily living skills and communication skills, participate in music and art therapy, and engage in social activities.

Supported Employment is a service that helps people with disabilities continue to develop the skills necessary to get and keep a job. It can include helping people identify the types of work they would like to do, helping them get a job, and providing on-the-job training. Each person in the program has a supported employment coach or an employment consultant who helps the individual identify a job best suited to his or her skills and interests. Coaches continue to work with individuals on the job as long as support and supervision are needed.

Weighing the Pros and Cons of Diploma Options

Earning a standard diploma offers students the most choices following high school. The charts on the next three pages summarize information about diplomas and certificates of completion. You can use these charts to help you make decisions by comparing the pros and cons of the various choices.



Pluses and Minuses of Standard Diploma Options

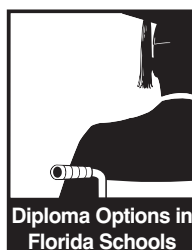
Option	What It Certifies	Pluses and Minuses
Standard Diploma: Traditional 24-Credit Standard Program	Certifies that the student has met the state and district requirements for a 24-credit standard diploma (course work, FCAT scores, and grade point average)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Recognized by employers + Accepted by technical centers, community colleges, and four-year colleges if high school course work meets minimum admission requirements + Recognized by military recruiters + Students with disabilities may be eligible for FCAT waiver.
Standard Diploma: Three-Year, 18-credit College Preparatory Program	Certifies that the student has met the state and district requirements for an 18-credit college preparatory standard diploma (course work, FCAT scores, and grade point average)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Recognized by employers + May be accepted by technical centers, community colleges, and four-year colleges if high school course work meets minimum admission requirements + Recognized by military recruiters if age requirements are met – Students with disabilities are not eligible for FCAT waiver.
Standard Diploma: Three-Year, 18-Credit Career Preparatory Program	Certifies that the student has met the state and district requirements for an 18-credit career preparatory standard diploma (course work, FCAT scores, and grade point average)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Recognized by employers + May be accepted by technical centers, community colleges, and four-year colleges if high school course work meets minimum admission requirements + Recognized by military recruiters if age requirements are met – Students with disabilities are not eligible for FCAT waiver.

Pluses and Minuses of Special Diploma Options

Option	What It Certifies	Pluses and Minuses
Special Diploma Option 1	Certifies mastery of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma and completion of district course requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is a high school diploma + Recognized by employers + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma. - Not accepted by four-year colleges - Not usually accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment, or enrollment in technical certificate programs) - May not be accepted by technical centers - May not be accepted by the military
Special Diploma Option 2	Certifies mastery of employment and community competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is a high school diploma + Student may continue employment after graduation. + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma. - Not available in some school districts - Not accepted by four-year colleges - Not usually accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment, or enrollment in technical certificate programs) - May not be accepted by technical centers - May not be accepted by the military

Pluses and Minuses of Certificate of Completion Options

Option	What It Certifies	Pluses and Minuses
Certificate of Completion	Certifies that the student passed the required courses in high school but failed to pass the Grade 10 FCAT and achieve the required grade point average	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma. - Not a high school diploma - Not accepted by four-year colleges - Not accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment or enrollment in technical certificate programs) - May not be accepted by technical centers - Not accepted by the military - Not recognized by employers
	Certifies that the student passed the required ESE courses, but failed to master all of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma. - Not a high school diploma - Not accepted by four-year colleges - Not accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment) - May not be accepted by technical centers - Not accepted by the military - Not recognized by employers



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Part 2: Choosing the Right Diploma □



In this section you will learn about choosing a diploma that will suit your child's abilities, interests, and post-graduation plans. The following topics are addressed:

- ◆ Choosing a Diploma—An Overview
- ◆ Strategies for Making the Best Diploma Choice
- ◆ Reviewing Diploma and Coursework Decisions Annually

Choosing a Diploma—An Overview

The path to choosing a diploma actually starts in elementary school. It's wise to get information about diploma options during the elementary school years. Ask your child's ESE teacher or the school guidance counselor how the educational program, curriculum, and services your child receives during the elementary years may affect diploma decisions made in middle and high school.

Near the end of middle school, you and your child will have an opportunity to plan the courses for high school. You will make your first formal decision about the type of diploma your son or daughter plans to earn.

Choosing a Diploma and Planning the Course of Study

The decision whether to work toward a standard diploma or a special diploma must first be addressed at the transition IEP meeting conducted during your child's eighth grade year or the year your child turns age 14, whichever comes first. Your son or daughter must be invited to participate in this and each transition IEP meeting in the years to come.

At this meeting, the transition IEP team, which includes you and your child, works together to decide whether a standard or special diploma is the best choice for your child. The team also plans the appropriate course of study, which may include basic education courses, career and technical education courses, and ESE courses. The team identifies any special accommodations and modifications needed to help your son or daughter participate fully in the educational program. All decisions are documented on the transition IEP. This information guides your child's educational program as he or she enters high school.



Choosing between Special Diploma Option 1 and Option 2

If the transition IEP team agrees on a special diploma, the team may select option 1 or 2, if option 2 is offered in your school district. The choice between the two types of special diplomas is often not made until the ninth or tenth grade. By that time your child should have a clearer picture of what he or she would like to do following graduation and may be old enough to be employed.

If the transition IEP team decides on special diploma option 2, the team creates an individualized graduation training plan for your child. This plan states exactly what your child must learn and do in terms of his or her employment and community competencies to earn the diploma.



Strategies for Making the Best Diploma Choice

The key to making the best diploma choice is to match your child's strengths and long-term goals with the diploma option. The diploma is useful when it meets the needs of your son or daughter.

The following strategies can be used to help insure a good match between the student and the diploma choice:

1. Review all available information regarding the student's progress.

Create a realistic picture of your child's abilities, interests, and likely post-school goals. □
Some valuable sources of information include □

- ◆ school records such as classroom tests, standardized tests, teacher observations, work samples, career assessments □
- ◆ prior IEPs and transition IEPs □
- ◆ teacher reports □
- ◆ input from you and your son or daughter, including his or her goals for employment and adult living. □

The transition IEP team members will need to answer a number of questions, such as the following: □

- ◆ How has the student performed in the educational program up to now? □
- ◆ How has the student performed in regular education classes? □
- ◆ What do the student's recent test scores indicate? □
- ◆ What does the student want to do and have the capability to do after high school? □
- ◆ Which diploma will help the student achieve these desired post-school goals? □

2. Make sure you and your child participate actively in the process.

You and your son or daughter play important roles in the transition IEP team. You can provide useful information that educators may not have access to. Some of the steps to take to prepare for and participate actively in the meeting are described below.

Things to Do Before Each Transition IEP Meeting

- ◆ Ask the school to provide updated information regarding
 - your child’s progress in school
 - topics that will be addressed at the meeting
 - what decisions will be made
 - what services will be documented on the transition IEP.
- ◆ Talk with your child to identify personal interests and feelings regarding the educational program and desired post-school outcomes. Help your son or daughter learn about possible educational and career opportunities.
- ◆ Make notes of things to share at the meeting or questions you would like to have answered. Encourage your child to do the same.

Participating in the Transition IEP Meeting

- ◆ Share your views regarding future learning goals for your child and encourage your child to share his or her views. Be prepared to discuss desired post-school outcomes. (Where and how does your child want to live and be employed? How will he or she spend leisure time and engage in social relationships three to five years after high school?) This information will help the team to think about which diploma is needed to achieve these post-school goals.
- ◆ Carefully review your child’s school records and previous IEPs or transition IEPs with the other team members. This will help determine what has already been accomplished and what is needed in the future to enable your child to attain his or her desired post-school goals.
- ◆ Ask questions to clarify information you do not understand.

3. ☐ If the diploma decision is unclear, use rating scales, questionnaires, or other instruments to help focus team input.

Sometimes the diploma choice is obvious to the members of the transition IEP team. In other situations, the decision may not be so clear. Transition IEP teams may use rating scales, questionnaires, and other instruments to help team members review critical factors that affect the diploma choice. These instruments are not meant to provide the final answer, but they often help to point the way. (See “Appendix E: Sample Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma Options” beginning on page 45.)

4. ☐ Choose a standard diploma when in doubt.

When you make the diploma decision the first time, it is important to aim high. Give the student every opportunity to achieve his or her best. The transition IEP team should select the traditional 24-credit standard diploma if it is not clear which diploma is most appropriate. Then, during the ninth and tenth grades, teachers and parents can keep a close watch on the student’s progress. They should consider the following questions:

- ◆ Is the student attending school regularly and trying hard?
- ◆ ☐ Is he or she receiving appropriate accommodations and ☐ assistance in school? ☐
- ◆ ☐ Is the student having a lot of problems or failing?



If the answer to all of these questions is yes, the IEP team may need to consider a special diploma.

5. ☐ When deciding between special diploma options 1 and 2, consider your child’s post-school goals and whether he or she would benefit from full-time employment.

For students who function well in the school environment, special diploma option 1 may be the best choice. Option 1 is academically based. However, it also provides opportunities for students to learn and practice real-world employment and community survival skills.

Consider special diploma option 2 if your child is not interested in the school program and plans to go to work right after graduation. With special diploma option 2, students are placed in full-time jobs while still in school. Students often continue in these jobs when they graduate.

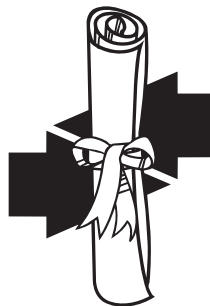
When considering option 2, think about how your child will get to and from a job each day. Ask your child’s ESE teachers about transportation services available in your district.

Reviewing Diploma and Coursework Decisions Annually

Diploma choices may be revisited at any time and must always be reviewed at annual transition IEP meetings throughout the high school years. Your son or daughter's needs, interests, abilities, and desired post-school outcomes may change over time. Decisions regarding the type of diploma, course of study, and accommodations must be reviewed annually at the transition IEP meeting. The transition IEP team makes changes as needed.

The diploma choice is reviewed annually at the transition IEP meeting, and the IEP team may change the type of diploma if needed. However, a change of diplomas late in a student's high school career may require additional time in school in either regular session or summer school. It's important that you and your son or daughter understand this early in the process.

Each school district must develop ways students can select and move between the standard diploma options, between standard or special diplomas, and between the special diploma options. General requirements for moving between diploma options are described on the next page.



Requirements for Moving between Diploma Options*

Moving between Standard Diploma Options

- ◆ A student may change graduation programs during the first three years of high school, in accordance with school district policy.
- ◆ A student who fails to complete the requirements for a three-year, 18-credit program must switch to the traditional 24-credit program. Special diplomas and certificates of completion are not available for the three-year programs.

Moving from Standard to Special Diploma

- ◆ A student may switch from a standard diploma to special diploma option 1 and receive credit toward a special diploma for passing basic education courses.
- ◆ A student who changes from standard diploma to special diploma option 2 must still master all employment and community competencies specified in the student's graduation training plan, regardless of the number and type of credits previously earned.

Moving from Special Diploma (Option 1 or Option 2) to Standard Diploma

- ◆ Students may switch from special diploma option 1 or 2 to a standard diploma and receive elective credit toward a standard diploma for passing ESE courses.
- ◆ Eight and a half elective credits are included in graduation requirements for a standard diploma earned through the traditional 24-credit program. Three elective credits are included in graduation requirements for a standard diploma earned through the three-year, 18-credit College Preparatory Program or Career Preparatory Program.

Moving between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2

- ◆ Students in special diploma option 2 are earning credits for ESE courses related to their employment and community competencies. If they wish to change to option 1, these credits may be applied toward the requirements for option 1.
- ◆ If a student has been pursuing option 1 and wishes to change to option 2, a graduation training plan will be developed. The student must master all employment and community competencies, regardless of the number and type of credits previously earned.

*Note: Information about special diplomas is adapted from *Let's Try Another Way: Implementing Special Diploma Option 2* (pp. 8-10), Florida Department of Education, 1995, Tallahassee, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.



Part 3: Planning for Graduation Year by Year ☐



In order to reach the desired goal—graduation—your child needs to make choices and plans starting in eighth grade and continuing through the high school years.

Things to Consider in Eighth Grade

As your child completes his or her last year of middle school, there are a number of important things to consider. They are described in detail in this section, which addresses the following topics:

- ◆ Making the First Formal Statement about Diploma Choice
- ◆ Developing a Plan for High School
- ◆ Developing Self-Determination Skills
- ◆ Exploring a Variety of Career Options
- ◆ Developing School Survival Skills.

Making the First Formal Statement about Diploma Choice

Your child makes his or her first formal statement about diploma choice and course of study at the transition IEP meeting in the eighth grade or the year he or she turns age 14, whichever comes first. The transition IEP team helps your child plan his or her course of study. The course of study identifies the specific courses your child needs to take in high school to earn a diploma.

Your son or daughter plays an active role in selecting the diploma. Your child should express his or her interests and desires regarding preferred post-school goals and diploma. The diploma choice and course of study will be reviewed annually and may be changed. (See “Reviewing Diploma and Coursework Decisions Annually” beginning on page 23 for additional information.)

Developing a Plan for High School

Eighth graders should begin to plan the high school courses and other experiences they will need to reach their post-school goals. Some districts provide planning guides or folders that support this process. If not, you and your child may want to keep a planning folder or portfolio at home.

The planning folder may include a summary of your child's likes and dislikes, strongest and weakest areas in school, and ways he or she learns best. It may contain a statement of desired post-school outcomes. It may also list the courses he or she will take in high school. The diploma and courses should reflect your child's capabilities and post-school goals.

Florida eChoices is an online education and career planning system available at www.floridae.choices.com. A guide entitled *Simply Careers! Helping Students with Disabilities Effectively Plan Their Futures through Comprehensive Career Development* may be ordered from the Florida Department of Education Clearinghouse Information Center. See "Appendix F: Resources" on page 49 for additional information about these resources.

Developing Self-Determination Skills

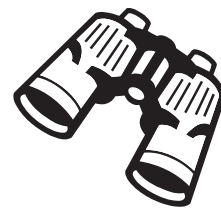
Students with disabilities should learn how to apply **self-determination skills** throughout middle and high school. Self-determination involves taking control and making decisions that affect one's life. Transition IEP meetings provide an ideal environment for your child to practice self-determination skills. He or she must play an active role in choosing post-school goals, making choices about the diploma, and planning a course of study.

Your son or daughter's school may offer special training in self-determination skills. Many ESE courses provide opportunities for teachers to assist students in developing these skills. Self-determination training helps students know their strengths and understand their rights. It also helps them become active participants in planning their futures.

Dare to Dream Revised: A Guide to Planning Your Future is a publication designed to help students develop self-determination skills. This document is available from the Florida Department of Education Clearinghouse Information Center. See "Appendix F: Resources" on page 49 for ordering information.

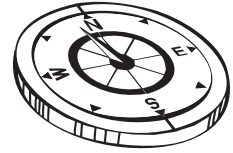
Exploring a Variety of Career Options

When your child considers desired post-school outcomes, it is helpful for him or her to know about a variety of careers. Ideally, all students should have an exploratory career and technical education course before they leave eighth grade. Students also benefit from completing career assessment activities. If these opportunities aren't available through your school district, consider joining with other parents to persuade the principal or district staff that this is very important for all students.



Sometimes taking an exploratory career and technical education course is not possible. However, you can find other ways for your son or daughter to explore careers. For example, you and your child might take the following steps:

- ◆ use self-scoring career or job interest or aptitude inventories from the public library
- ◆ visit places where different kinds of jobs are being performed
- ◆ do volunteer work together in the community
- ◆ participate in job fairs in other schools or in the community
- ◆ visit a vocational or career counselor
- ◆ ask your school guidance counselor to help locate additional information about careers.



When gathering information about particular jobs and careers, ask questions and get the information you need. The main things to find out are listed below.

- ◆ What does a person in a job like this really do? ☐
- ◆ What kind of training is required to do this job? ☐
- ◆ What basic skills (such as reading, writing, and mathematics) are required for this job? ☐
- ◆ Is this job something my son or daughter seems interested in, might like to do, and ☐ would be able to do ?

The more your child learns about potential jobs and careers, the more able he or she will be to make appropriate plans for graduation and beyond.

Developing School Survival Skills

School survival skills help students maximize their ability to learn independently in middle and high school. Students should begin developing school survival skills in middle school and continue to apply these skills in the high school years.

School survival skills help students learn how to

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| ◆ study | ◆ get organized |
| ◆ take notes | ◆ manage time |
| ◆ get more from lectures | ◆ set goals <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ◆ complete assignments | ◆ speak up for themselves <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ◆ take tests | ◆ follow written and unwritten rules. <input type="checkbox"/> |

These skills may be taught in a separate class such as Learning Strategies or included as part of ESE, career and technical, or basic education classes. Programs in school survival skills may also be available through private tutors.

Planning for Graduation in the High School Years

During the high school years there are specific steps to take along the road to graduation. Your son or daughter should continue to develop and apply self-determination and school survival skills and explore career options. The diploma choice made in eighth grade will be reviewed annually.

Encourage your child to track his or her progress towards graduation on a regular basis. (See Online Courses and Tools on page 51 in “Appendix F: Resources.”) It’s important that your child keep track of his or progress toward graduation each year with help from parents, teachers, counselors, or other school staff. The list that follows can be used to keep track of progress toward graduation.

- ◆□ Update the contents of the high school planning folder started in eighth grade. This should be done at the beginning and end of each year. Plan, revise, or document information, including
 - courses taken each year
 - employment and career-related experiences
 - extracurricular activities
 - community activities
 - awards and special recognition
 - test results.
- ◆□ Pass the required courses.
- ◆□ Monitor the grade point average and credits earned towards graduation. Consider retaking courses with low grades (D) to bring up the GPA. Districts have different policies for retaking courses. The guidance counselor or teachers can provide more information about this process.
- ◆□ If necessary, enroll in summer school or other remediation opportunities available in your school district.

The transition IEP team must address the services the student may need to help make the transition to adult life after high school. Planning for services begins with the transition IEP meeting held during the year the child turns 16, but it may occur earlier if needed. These services may include

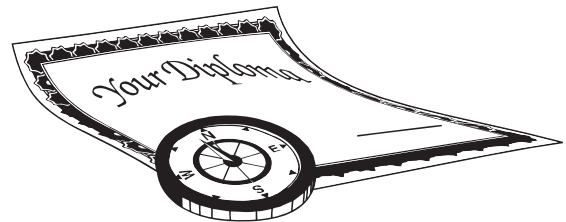
- ◆□ instruction
- ◆ community experiences□
- ◆ development of employment and other post-school adult living skills□
- ◆ related services.□

The team may also address the development of daily living skills or arrange for a functional vocational evaluation.

The transition IEP team will identify agencies that can provide services for your child after high school. Personnel from these service agencies will be invited to attend the transition IEP meeting. The transition IEP team will help you understand the steps you and your child must take to receive agency services.

The Transition Center at the University of Florida provides valuable resources and services related to high school education and transition to adult life for students with disabilities. See Information, Resources, and Services in “Appendix F: Resources” on page 51 for additional information.

As your child moves through high school, other necessary steps to graduation will depend on the diploma option your son or daughter is pursuing. The chart on the next page provides a summary of steps students should take in the last two years of high school to earn each type of diploma.



Steps to Graduation in the Last Two Years of High School

Diploma	Next-to-Last Year of School	Last Year of School
Standard Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retake the FCAT if needed • Take the SAT or ACT if applying to colleges or universities • Explore programs at technical centers, community colleges, and universities • Begin the process of referral for agency assistance (This may occur at an earlier time if needed.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a final check of graduation credits and GPA • Retake the FCAT if needed • Retake the SAT or ACT if desired • Visit technical centers, community colleges, or universities • Apply for admission and financial aid to desired technical centers, community colleges, or universities • Make plans for living arrangements after graduation • Consider summer employment for extra money in postsecondary school • Follow up on agency referrals • Start job search
Special Diploma Option 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the process of referral for agency assistance (This may occur earlier if needed.) • Explore programs at technical centers, community colleges, adult education programs, and adult training programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a final check of graduation requirements • Make sure that all Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma have been mastered • Apply for admission to desired technical centers or start job search • Make plans for living arrangements after graduation • Follow up on agency referrals
Special Diploma Option 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the process of referral for agency assistance (This may occur earlier if needed.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a job if you don't have one already • Keep a job, with good evaluations • Show mastery of employment and community competencies in graduation training plan • Complete mastery of transition IEP goals related to employment and community living • Make plans for living arrangements after graduation • Follow up on agency referrals



Part 4: A Note about the Future ☐



Staying Informed of Changes

Change occurs in almost all areas of our lives. Education is no exception. It's important to stay informed of changes that are occurring regarding diploma requirements. Discuss the changes with your child's teachers or guidance counselor.

It's a good idea to learn about changes in State testing programs and requirements. For example, the types of accommodations allowed on the FCAT were recently expanded. You will need to learn about changes in state laws that affect graduation requirements for students with disabilities. This information can be obtained from your child's school. It will also be reported in the newspaper and on radio or television news.

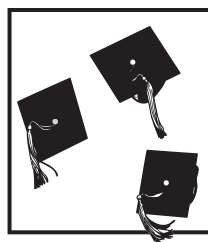
You may also access the information online through the Florida Department of Education web site (<http://fldoe.org>). See Resources Online on page 50 in "Appendix F: Resources" for additional information.

Planning for the Future

There are three things parents and students can do to plan for the future.

1. ☐ Use the information available now to make the best possible choices.
2. ☐ Stay informed about changes so that when they take place you will be ☐ ready for them. ☐
3. ☐ Let your voice be heard in your son or daughter's school about the educational program and transition-related issues.

You now have information to use in deciding which path your child should take toward graduation. The next step is to work with teachers, other family members, community members, and especially your son or daughter to make sure he or she works toward a diploma that will lead to a productive and fulfilling adult life.



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Appendices □

Appendix A: Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma

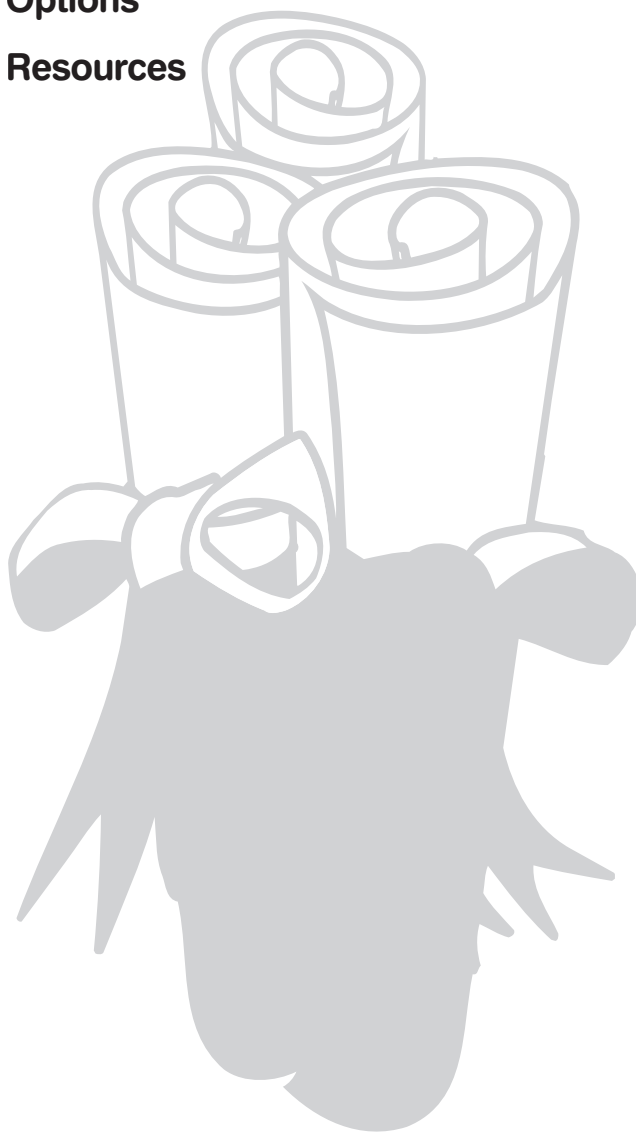
Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications

Appendix C: The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma

**Appendix D: Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of
General Educational Development (GED Tests)**

**Appendix E: Sample Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma
Options**

Appendix F: Resources



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Appendix A

Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma

Students in Florida's public high schools must meet certain requirements to graduate with a standard diploma. Beginning 2003-2004, they may choose one of three graduation options. Students should select the program that best prepares them for their education or career goals for life after high school. Check with your local school district for details.

Requirements for Standard Diploma Options*

Courses	General Requirements for High School Graduation (4-Year)	College Preparatory Program (3-Year)	Career Preparatory Program (3-Year)
English	4 credits (major concentration in composition and literature)	4 credits (major concentration in composition and literature)	4 credits (major concentration in composition and literature)
Mathematics	3 credits (one of which must be Algebra I or its equivalent)	3 credits at the Algebra I level or above from the list of courses that qualify for state university admission	3 credits (one of which must be Algebra I or its equivalent)
Science	3 credits (two must have a laboratory component)	3 credits in natural science (two must have a laboratory component)	3 credits in natural science (two must have a laboratory component)
Social Studies	1 credit world history 1 credit American history 1/2 credit American government 1/2 credit economics	3 credits (school districts may specify which courses)	3 credits (school districts may specify which courses)
Foreign Language	Not required for high school graduation; required for admission into state universities	2 credits or demonstrated proficiency in same second language	2 credits or demonstrated proficiency in same second language
Practical Arts/ Performing Fine Arts	1 credit practical arts, career education, or exploratory career education or 1 credit performing fine arts or 1/2 credit in practical arts and 1/2 credit in performing fine arts	Not required	Not required
Life Management	1/2 credit	Not required	Not required
Physical Education	1 credit (including 1/2 credit of personal fitness and 1/2 credit of physical education elective)	Not required	Not required
Electives	8 1/2 credits	3 credits	3 credits
TOTAL	24 credits	18 credits	18 credits (includes 3 credits in one sequential CTE [vocational] program)
State Assessment Requirements	Earn passing scores on the Grade 10 FCAT	Earn passing scores on the Grade 10 FCAT	Earn passing scores on the Grade 10 FCAT
Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirements	Earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0 on an unweighted 4.0 scale	Earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0 on an unweighted 4.0 scale	Earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0 on an unweighted 4.0 scale

*Adapted from Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services. (2003). *High school graduation options 2003-2004* (TAP No. FY 2004-01). Tallahassee, FL: Author.

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Appendix B □

Accommodations and Modifications □

Students with disabilities may need accommodations and modifications to participate successfully in basic education or career and technical education courses in regular classrooms. Accommodations change the way students are taught and tested. Modifications change the expectations for what students learn.

Classroom Accommodations

Classroom accommodations do not change what students are expected to learn. Examples of accommodations are listed below.

Classroom Accommodations

Area of Accommodation	Examples
Teaching methods and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use hands-on activities ◆ Use PASS materials to supplement English I materials ◆ Use manipulatives to solve math problems
Assignments and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Give student copies of lecture notes and overheads ◆ Use a checklist for each step of procedure ◆ Have science test read to student
Learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use a study carrel for independent work ◆ Use adapted workstation for wheelchair
Time demands and schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Allow additional time to complete assignments ◆ Limit independent work sessions to 20 minutes
Assistive technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use special communication devices ◆ Use a word processor with voice input

The IEP team identifies the accommodations and modifications the student with a disability needs to participate in classes. The aids and services may include assistive technology, special materials and equipment, use of special communication systems, and any services and supports that are needed. Accommodations are documented on the 504 plan for a student who qualifies for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Accommodations for Assessments

Accommodations for assessments do not change what the test measures. They only change the way the student takes the test. Determination of appropriate accommodations in assessments is based on the individual needs of each student. Students with disabilities may be provided accommodations for state tests such as the FCAT. The types of accommodations that are allowed on the FCAT are specified by the Florida Department of Education. Accommodations used with the FCAT should be similar to those that the student uses in the classroom. The transition IEP team or 504 plan team makes the decisions about necessary accommodations. Accommodations may also be allowed for district, school, or classroom assessments. The chart below includes examples of possible accommodations.

Accommodations for Assessments*

Type of Accommodation	Examples
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use Braille or large print versions ◆ Use a blank card or tool to focus attention on the questions ◆ Have the writing prompt, or mathematics or science questions read aloud or signed. Passages and questions on the reading test may not be read aloud or signed.
Responding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mark the answers directly on the test ◆ Tell or sign answers to the test proctor ◆ Braille answers on separate paper
Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Take the test in short time periods with breaks ◆ Use extra time in the testing session to complete the test ◆ Take a specific subtest at a specific time of day
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Take the test alone ◆ Take the test in a small group ◆ Use adaptive furniture or special lighting or acoustics
Assistive Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use adapted calculators for complex computation in grades 7-10 ◆ Use technology for writing answers to extended response questions ◆ Use visual magnification or auditory amplifications

*Adapted from Florida Department of Education. (2004). *Information for parents and teachers—Planning FCAT accommodations for students with disabilities*. Tallahassee, FL: Author.

Some students with disabilities may need a unique accommodation that is not listed in the FCAT manual. Unique accommodations usually involve changes to the existing test materials, such as increasing the space between test items or placing fewer items on a page. The Commissioner of Education must approve the use of a unique accommodation.

Two pamphlets are available from the Florida Department of Education to help you learn more about accommodations and the FCAT. You can order them free of charge. Request *Information for Parents–FCAT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities* and *Information for Parents and Teachers–Planning FCAT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*. See “Appendix F: Resources” on page 49 for ordering information.

Participation in Testing

The transition IEP team decides how a student with disabilities will participate in state and districtwide testing programs. This decision should be guided by the performance of the student, consideration of the desired school or post-school outcomes, and the curriculum and instructional goals for the student. The team should also consider whether the student is working toward a standard diploma or a special diploma. Students planning to seek a standard diploma must take the FCAT.

Students who have significant cognitive disabilities may require a modified or specialized curriculum. These students are unable to complete the required coursework and achieve the Sunshine State Standards. They are learning the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma skills. Instead of the FCAT, an **alternate assessment** is used to measure their progress. A student who takes an alternate assessment is working toward a special diploma. The transition IEP team determines which alternate assessment will be used.

Modification of Course Requirements

There are specific guidelines for modifying basic education and career and technical education courses (changing the expectations for what students will learn in a course). Basic education courses are academic courses, such as English I or world history. Career and technical education courses are courses that prepare a student for a career he or she has selected, such as drafting or automotive mechanics.

Modifications to Basic Education Courses

For students earning a standard diploma, course requirements for basic education courses may not be modified. Students are expected to meet all the course requirements.

If the requirements for a basic education course are modified in high school, the credit may not be used to meet graduation requirements for a standard diploma. However, the credit can be used to meet graduation requirements for a special diploma.

Modifications to Career and Technical Education Courses

In contrast, career and technical education programs and course requirements may be modified or changed as long as the changes are aimed at preparing the student for the job he or she has selected. Credit earned may be used to meet graduation requirements for a standard or a special diploma.

For example, a student with disabilities may be interested in the career and technical education program designed to train diesel engine mechanics. However, the student may want to work as an assistant to the mechanic. The performance standards for the job of diesel engine mechanic can be modified to qualify the student as a mechanic's assistant. These modifications should be documented through the transition IEP process.

Exceptional Student Education Courses

ESE academic courses reflect a modified curriculum. They have lower-level requirements than basic education courses. In general, these courses may not be used in place of the regular academic courses required for a standard diploma. The ESE courses for vocational education (career and technical education) may be used to meet the practical arts requirement for the traditional four-year, 24-credit standard diploma. Other ESE courses may be taken for elective credits toward a standard diploma.

Appendix C

The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma*

Most students with disabilities work toward a standard diploma. They learn the knowledge and skills in the Sunshine State Standards. A small number of students with more significant cognitive disabilities may learn the knowledge and skills in the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma. The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma are designed to prepare students for adult living and employment after graduation. Mastery of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma is required for special diploma option 1.

The **domains** and **strands** of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma are briefly described in the chart.

Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma

Domains (Areas)	Strands (Topics)
Curriculum and Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Strand A: The Sunshine State Standards</i> Addresses the student's progress toward achieving the regular Sunshine State Standards with modifications ◆ <i>Strand B: Functional Academics</i> Includes functional skills in the areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, mathematics, and problem solving ◆ <i>Strand C: Life Work</i> Addresses workplace competencies relating to job preparation, task management, use of tools and technology, and employability skills
Independent Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Strand A: Personal Care</i> Includes the skills and knowledge associated with personal daily living and care, and accessing community resources ◆ <i>Strand B: Self-Management</i> Includes personal planning and decision making, as well as appropriate conduct in daily living and work roles
Social and Emotional Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Strand A: Working with Others</i> Focuses on working in groups and developing interpersonal relationships
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Strand A: Communicating with Others</i> Addresses the ability to participate effectively in initiating and responding to communication

For each strand, standards and benchmarks describe what students are expected to know and be able to do. The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma have benchmarks at three levels of functioning.

- ◆□ Independent Level: Students are able to perform the behaviors for each benchmark on their own.
- ◆□ Supported Level: Students require ongoing use of assistive aids, prompting, or□ supervision in order to perform the behaviors for each benchmark.□
- ◆□ Participatory Level: Students require extensive assistance to be able to participate in activities of daily living as indicated in the benchmarks.

A student with disabilities is expected to master each standard at a level of functioning that is appropriate for the individual student as determined by the transition IEP team.

Note: * Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services. (1999). *Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma*. Tallahassee, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.

Appendix D

Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests)

Students may obtain a State of Florida high school diploma by passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests). Accommodations can be provided for the GED Tests for students with documented disabilities. Passing these tests enables people to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills usually acquired through four years of high school. Several ways that a student might work towards that goal are described below.

- ◆ Students who leave high school without earning a standard diploma (including students who earn a special diploma or certificate of completion) may earn a State of Florida high school diploma by passing the GED Tests. Students may attend classes offered through adult education to prepare for the GED Tests.
- ◆ Students who leave high school without a standard diploma, and who are at least 18 years of age, may be granted provisional admission to a community college. They may be allowed to take up to 12 credit hours as nondegree-seeking students provided they pass the GED Tests while they are enrolled.
- ◆ High school students who lack the required course credits or GPA to graduate may be eligible to work towards earning a diploma under the GED Exit Option Model. These students may earn a standard diploma from their local high school by passing both the FCAT and the GED Tests. If they pass only the GED Tests, they will earn a State of Florida diploma.

Your school district may offer more options than the ones mentioned above. Call your local ESE or adult education contact person for further information about all the possible graduation options available to your son or daughter.

Pros and Cons of Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests

A diploma earned by passing the GED Tests is usually accepted by employers, community colleges, four-year colleges, and technical schools. It is recognized by military recruiters, as long as the applicant meets other requirements. However, some branches of the military may limit the number of persons accepted with this type of diploma. Keep in mind that the academic requirements of the GED Tests may be challenging for some students.

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Appendix E

Sample Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma Options

This appendix contains samples of two rating scales that may be used to provide additional information to the IEP team for making diploma choices.

- ◆ *The Student Profile for Choosing a Standard or Special Diploma Option* on page 46 is an example of a tool that may be used to assist the transition IEP team in deciding whether a student should pursue a standard diploma or a special diploma. This form helps the team consider the student's level of functioning in five key areas—cognition, curriculum, social/emotional behavior, communication, and level of independence.

Note: From “Student Profile for Standard/Special Diploma,” Palm Beach County School District, Exceptional Student Education Department, 1996, West Palm Beach, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.

- ◆ *Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2* on page 47 is an example of a tool that may help the IEP team in deciding between special diploma option 1 and special diploma option 2.

Note: From “Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options,” Palm Beach County School District, Exceptional Student Education Department, 1996, West Palm Beach, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.

Student Profile for Choosing a Standard or Special Diploma Option*

Directions:

- For each category, place a check in the box that best describes the level of functioning of the student.
- Record the number of boxes checked in each level. Add totals to find A, B, and C as described below.

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
COGNITION (IQ)	<input type="checkbox"/> Significantly below average	<input type="checkbox"/> Well below average	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly below average	<input type="checkbox"/> Low average	<input type="checkbox"/> Average	<input type="checkbox"/> Above average
CURRICULUM	<input type="checkbox"/> Very different curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> Modified curriculum, community-based instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular curriculum taught in ESE setting	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular curriculum with support of ESE staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular curriculum at or near grade level	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular curriculum at or above grade level
SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> Very poor personal adjustment and relationships; requires 1-1 assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor personal adjustment and relationships; requires assistance in most settings	<input type="checkbox"/> Below average personal adjustment and relationships; requires behavioral contract	<input type="checkbox"/> Average personal adjustment and relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Good personal adjustment and relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent personal adjustment and relationships
COMMUNICATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses gestures or vocalizations to communicate	<input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty understanding and communicating with most people –using speech, sign language, or device; no written communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty communicating with some people–using speech, sign language, or device; limited written communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited oral, signed, or written communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Expresses self well using speech or sign language; needs some help with written communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Expresses self well through speaking and writing
INDEPENDENT FUNCTIONING	<input type="checkbox"/> Requires full-time personal assistant to care for personal needs and manage on-task behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Requires much help with personal care; needs supervision to maintain acceptable behaviors in most situations	<input type="checkbox"/> Requires occasional help with personal care; needs prompting or supervision to stay on task; is reluctant to try new things	<input type="checkbox"/> Takes care of some personal needs; reliable and responsible in familiar situations; has some difficulty dealing with new situations	<input type="checkbox"/> Takes care of most personal needs; generally reliable and responsible; hesitant to stand up for self	<input type="checkbox"/> Takes care of all personal needs; always reliable and responsible; can advocate for self
Total	Total Boxes Checked for Level 1 = _____	Total Boxes Checked for Level 2 = _____	Total Boxes Checked for Level 3 = _____	Total Boxes Checked for Level 4 = _____	Total Boxes Checked for Level 5 = _____	Total Boxes Checked for Level 6 = _____

A = ____ (Total of Levels 1, 2, and 3) Special diploma should be considered if there are more boxes checked in A than B.

B = ____ (Total of Levels 4, 5, and 6) Standard diploma should be considered if there are more boxes checked in B than A.

C = ____ (Total of Level 3)

Standard diploma should be considered if most boxes checked are in Level 3. Then monitor child's progress carefully.

*(This decision must be made by the entire transition IEP team, not by one individual.)

Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2

There are many things to consider when deciding which special diploma option your student should choose. Some of these are listed below. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. These are only guidelines, not the final answer.

Directions:

1. Place a check in the box beside the statement in each row that best describes how you view your child and his/her behavior.
2. Record the point value and then total up the points from all the rows.
3. Use the point guidelines at the bottom to assist you in making the decision.

STATEMENTS		POINTS A = 1 B = 2 C = 3
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student likes schoolwork (activities, materials, classes, homework, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student does not like schoolwork. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student refuses to do schoolwork.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student enjoys being in school with his or her friends. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student does not enjoy being in school. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student resists going to school.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student is not likely to drop out before graduating. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student is very likely to drop out before graduating. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student has already discussed wanting to drop out.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student has mastered most of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student has mastered some of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student has mastered few of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student has never worked and shows little interest in employment. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student has some interest and experience in working. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student has good work potential.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student will probably live in a group or congregate setting after high school. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student will probably live with parents after high school. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student will probably live on his or her own after high school		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student has few community skills. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student gets around in the community fairly well. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student gets around in the community very well.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student has many behavior problems. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student has few behavior problems. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student has no behavior problems.		
<input type="checkbox"/> A. The student behaves better in school than out of school. <input type="checkbox"/> B. The student acts about the same whether in or out of school. <input type="checkbox"/> C. The student behaves better out of school than in school (and would probably behave well in a work-type setting).		

TOTAL POINTS =

9 - 17 = Special Diploma Option 1 may be the best choice for the student.
18 - 27 = Special Diploma Option 2 may be the best choice for the student.

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Appendix F

Resources

Florida Department of Education Publications

The following resources are available free of charge through the Florida Department of Education's Clearinghouse Information Center. To order these resources, contact the Clearinghouse by phone, mail, fax, or email. Be sure to include the accession number and the title of the publication when ordering. Visit the website to see a complete index of publications. Some resources may be downloaded directly from the website.

Clearinghouse Information Center □
 325 West Gaines Street, Suite 628 □
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400 □
 Telephone: (850) 245-0477 □
 FAX: (850) 245-0987 □
 email: cicbiscs@fldoe.org □
 website: <http://www.myfloridaeducation.com/commhome> □

Accession Number □	Title of Publication □
310753 □	<i>Accommodations and Modifications: What Parents Need to Know.</i> □ Revised 2003. (Request 310840 for a Spanish version.) □
311201 □	<i>Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities</i> □ <i>in Vocational Education and Adult General Education.</i> 2001. □
309674 □	"Alternate Assessment" (pamphlet). 2000.
308942 □	<i>Dare to Dream Revised: A Guide to Planning your Future.</i> 1999.
309413 □	<i>Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans: A Guide for</i> □ <i>Instructional Personnel and Families.</i> Revised 2000. □
310487A □	"The Florida Sunshine State Standards and Students with □ Disabilities: What Parents Need to Know" (poster/brochure, rev. □ ed.). Revised 2004. □
303412A □	<i>For Parents of Florida's Students with Disabilities: An Introduction</i> □ <i>to Exceptional Student Education.</i> 2001. (Request 309480 for a □ Spanish version.) □
310912 □	<i>The GED Exit Option Model: Procedure Manual.</i> Revised 2003.

- 311901 □ “Information for Parents—FCAT Accommodations for Students □
with Disabilities” (brochure). Revised 2004. □
- 309603 □ “Information for Parents and Teachers—Planning FCAT □
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities” (pamphlet). □
Revised 2004. □
- 309014 □ *Let’s Try Another Way: A Guide to Implementing Special □
Diploma Option 2.* 1995. □
- 311350 □ *Program Options for Students with Disabilities: Vocational □
Education and Adult General Education—What Students and □
Families Need to Know.* 2002. □
- 312087 □ *Simply Careers: Helping Students with Disabilities Effectively Plan □
Their Futures Through Comprehensive Career Development—A □
Guide for Persons Involved in Transition Planning.* 2003. □

Career Cruiser is a career planning resource available through the Florida Department of Education Products Catalog. Order by calling 1-800-342-9271 or writing to Bureau of Program Planning and Development, Division of Workforce Development, Florida Department of Education, Turlington Building, Room 644, 325 West Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400. *Career Cruiser* is also available in a downloadable pdf file from the website: (<http://www.firn.edu/doe/workforce/publicat.htm>).

Resources Online

Information, Resources, and Services

- Florida Department of Education
<http://www.fldoe.org>
The website provides up-to-date information regarding all aspects of education in Florida, including testing and graduation requirements.
- Florida DOE Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
<http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00014>
This section of the Florida DOE website provides information regarding resources and services available to Florida students with disabilities and their families and educators.
- State of Florida Official GED website
<http://www.aceofflorida.org/ged>
This website provides information for students, parents, and educators regarding the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests) and related resources.

- The Transition Center at University of Florida
<http://www.thetransitioncenter.org>
This website provides valuable resources and services for educators, students, and families related to high school education and transition to adult life for students with disabilities.

- Teaching Resources for Florida Exceptional Student Education
<http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/ese>
This website provides information and resources for parents and educators of students with disabilities regarding curriculum (general and exceptional student education), instructional planning, instructional materials, accommodations and modifications, and other topics.

- Florida Inclusion Network
<http://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com>
This website provides information and services for educators, families, and community members to facilitate education of students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Online Courses and Tools

- 12th Grade Options **<http://www.12thGradeOptions.org>**
This section of the Florida DOE website provides online remedial resources for 12th graders working towards passing the FCAT and/or GED tests.

- FACTS **<http://FACTS.org>**
This website provides Florida’s public high school or college students and their parents resources to track individual student progress towards graduation, scholarships, and meeting requirements for admission to state universities.

- FCAT Explorer **<http://www.fcatexplorer.org>**
This section of the DOE website provides practice and reinforcement activities for the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks addressed on the reading and math FCAT tests. Public school students, teachers, and administrators may access the FCAT Explorer free of charge.

- Florida eChoices **<http://www.floridaechoices.com>**
This website provides an education and career planning system with information about careers and tools that enable the student to create and maintain a personalized career-planning portfolio.

- Florida Virtual School **<http://www.flvs.net>**
This website provides access to online courses and instruction to Florida students in eighth grade and above through enrollment in their local school district. FCAT review study skills courses are also available for eighth graders and high school students.

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Jim Horne, Commissioner

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